

Report by Wehrmacht Officer on Massacre in the Ukraine

Roesle, Major

presently Kassel,

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Report

The notification from the Infantry Reserve Regiment 52 concerning "Conduct with regard to the Civilian Population in the East" causes me to submit the following report:

Towards the end of July 1941, I.R. [Infantry Regiment] 528, of which I was in command, was on its way from the West to Schitomir, where it was to move into a rest camp. On the day of our arrival, in the afternoon, when I had moved into the Staff Quarters together with my Staff, we heard salvos of rifle fire at regular intervals, fired at no great distance, and followed by pistol shots after a little while. I decided to investigate this matter and with my Adjutant and Ordnance Officer (First Lieutenant v. Bassewitz and Lt. Mueller-Brodmann) set out in the direction of the rifle fire. We soon received the impression that some cruel show must be taking place here because after a while we saw numerous soldiers and civilians streaming towards a railway embankment in front of us; we were informed that executions were being carried out continuously behind it. Throughout this time we were unable to see across the railway embankment to the other side, but at regular intervals we heard the sound of a trilling whistle and then a salvo of about 10 rifle shots, followed after a certain interval by pistol shots. When we finally climbed up the railway embankment a sight was revealed to us on the other side of a horrible cruelty that was bound to shake and disgust anyone who came face to face with it unprepared. A pit had been cut in the ground, about 4 m. wide and 7-8 m. long, and the excavated earth had been piled up on one side. This mound and the side of the pit beneath it were stained all over with streams of blood. The pit itself was filled with human corpses of all kinds and both sexes in such numbers that it was difficult to estimate them; it was not possible to judge the depth of the pit. Behind the mound of excavated earth a Police Commando was lined up with a Police Officer in command. The uniforms of the commandos were stained with blood. In a wide circle stood countless soldiers

of troop units already stationed there, some as spectators, dressed in swimming trunks, as well as many civilians with women and children. I stepped right up to the pit to obtain a picture that I have not been able to forget until this day. Among others there was an old man with a long white beard lying in the grave, with a little walking stick still hooked over his left arm. As this man still gave signs of life by his stertorous breathing, I requested one of the policemen to kill him off, but he answered with a laugh: "I fired seven shots into his belly, he'll croak on his own." The persons who had been shot were not placed in the grave in any order, but stayed there lying as they had fallen from the wall of the pit after they were shot. All these persons had been killed by shots in the back of the neck and then finished off with pistol shots from the top. I did not acquire any excessive sensitivity of the emotions during my service in the World War and in the French and Russian campaigns of this war; and experienced much that was more than unpleasant when I was active in the volunteer units in 1919, but I cannot recall ever having witnessed a scene such as that I have described here. I am not concerned here with whatever court decisions may have formed the basis for the executions I have described, I felt it was not reconcilable with our concepts of custom and decency up to the present time and that a mass slaughter of human beings should be carried out quite publicly, as on an outdoor stage. I wish to add that according to statements by soldiers who frequently watch these executions, several hundreds of persons were said to be shot every day.

Source: Yizhak Arad, Yisrael Gutman, Abraham Margalio (Eds.), *Documents on the Holocaust, Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland and the Soviet Union*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1981, Document no.195 . pp 130-132.